DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 036 817 CG 004 972

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TITLE Making Use of Systems Thought in Social Work Practice: Some Bridging Ideas.
INSTITUTION Illinois Univ., Urbana. Graduate School of Social Work.
PUB DATE 26 Sep 69
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at Conference on Current Trends in Army Social Work, Denver, Colorado, September 22-26, 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.60
DESCRIPTORS Armed Forces, Conceptual Schemes, Models, *Social Work, Social Workers, *Systems Approach

ABSTRACT

Ways in which systems thought can be employed in military social work and social work in general are discussed. A four tiered effort is suggested in which each level successively comes closer to the problem of effectively using systems thought. First it calls for gaining sufficient familiarity with a systems perspective as a way of looking at things and thinking retrospectively and currently about problems of practice in systems terms. Second it calls for the fashioning of a systems approach out of the system perspective by identifying some of its critical elements and uniting these with a prospective stance and with concrete problems. At the third level it calls for divising and developing a set of procedures and techniques for systems analysis and systems design relative to problems handled in social work. The fourth level calls for the setting forth of probationary conceptual imperatives to link the essentials into an intelligible whole. Attention is also directed at model construction as a necessary intellectual tool in using systems thought and the following practice models are identified: (1) existing system, (2) intersystem, and (3) revamped or new system. The social worker is urged to share with others his experiences with system-oriented practice and his reflections on such experiences. (Author/RSM)

Making Use of Systems Thought in Social Work Practice: Some Bridging Ideas

by

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September 1969

Prepared for presentation at the 1969 Conference on Current Trends in Army Social Work: The General Systems Approach in Army Social Work Planning and Practice, Session on "General Systems Theory in Army Social Work Practice: Some Bridging Principles."
U.S. Army Fitzsimmons General Hospital
Denver, Colorado, 22-26 September 1969

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Statement of Purpose

The intent of this paper is to set forth ways in which systems thought can be usefully employed in the professional practice of social work, with special attention to military social work. It aspires to bring systems ideas and the application of systems logic to some of the problems encountered in day-by-day social work practice. A particular concern is how the profession can make use of systems thought in organizing the intellectual work intimately and inevitably associated with professional day-by-day practice.

In a search for bridging ideas, it attempts some guidelines, raises some cautions, lists some advantages, suggests some habits of mind, and investigates some concepts stemming from systems theory. Thus it focuses on and endeavors to establish the means by which the social work practitioner may have access to the use of systems thought, that is, to provide a bridge between abstract systems thought and the problems of day-by-day practice--to bring a systems perspective and approach within the orbit and reach of day-by-day practice.

To be most professionally productive, delineation of a systems approach ought not only to afford a better understanding of the range of professional situations and problems with which social workers deal, but ought to go beyond that to identification and development of a systems approach as a distinguishable, singular effort. It should aim to provide

a general orientation out of which to act from both cognitive and operational perspectives.

In short, this paper aims to present the systems perspective and approach as an avenue of thought which in turn, when diligently pursued by the social worker, will create systems-oriented mode of analysis, and operational methods and techniques.

Responsibility of the Social Worker Toward the Development of Systems Thought

Primary responsibility for employing and developing use of systems thought in social work practice, as well as the linking of their findings as to the nature of the systems with which social workers deal with other bodies of knowledge, rests with social workers, individually and collectively, if it is to be done at all. In military social work a parallel responsibility rests with the military social workers.

If neglected by social workers, the task will not be performed knowledgeably and competently by anyone else, although there is pressure for the use of systems thought in relation to social concerns and there are others who stand willing to try, particularly those who vocationally regard themselves as systems analysts or system designers. Dr. Ida R. Hoos, in her study of the efforts of the aerospace industry in California of to use its concept and techniques/systems analysis in five subject areas of state government, writes that:

> If one is willing to concede that systems analysis is a form of technological spinoff, then technological utilization may be regarded as a primary motive. This is especially significant in light of Ralph E. Lepp's dictum that 'technological possibilities are irresistible to man.' They contain an imperative and will be put to use.[1]

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[1] Ida R. Hoos. "A Critique of the Application of Systems Analysis to Social Problems." Internal Working Papers, No. 61. Berkeley: Space Sciences Laboratory, Social Sciences Project, University of California, 1967, PP. 26 (dittoed) at p. 7. The quotation is from Ralph E. Lepp. The New Priesthood. New York, 1965, p. 67. The five subject areas were: waste management, mass transportation, information storage and retrieval, crime control and social welfare.

Another one of her conclusions, although stated with reference to public administrators, seems equally applicable to all social workers, including, of course, military social workers. Dr. Hoos writes that:

> Public administrators have already learned, from their early experience with these techniques, that they themselves must either learn to articulate their objectives and conceptualize their problems or abdicate that vital responsibility to others certainly less familiar with and understandably less committed to their goals. To the extent that a model sets forth all pertinent attainable aspects of the problem, takes into account its inner relationships, and grasps faithfully the outside factors impinging on it, much can be learned in the building and manipulation, provided that interpretations are made with seasoned judgment and orientation. The function of the government official appears clearly defined here. Intelligent participation in, rather than passive acquiescence to or smouldering resentment against, the process of systems analysis might, in the long run, have the beneficial feedback effect of improving both the methodology and the quality of public service.[2]

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[2]Ida R. Hoos. Ibid., p. 25. Her series of papers include:

"The Application of Systems Analysis to Social Problems: The California Experience," 1965;

"A Critique on the Application of Systems Analysis to Social Problems," 1967;

"Systems Analysis, Information Handling, and the Research Function: Implications of the California Experience," 1967;

"Systems Analysis in Government Administration: A Critical Analysis," 1968;

"Systems Analysis in State Government," 1968;

"Systems Analysis as a Technique for Solving Social Problems--A Realistic Overview," 1968;

"A Critical Review of Systems Analysis: The California Experience," 1968.

All were published as Internal Working Papers by Social Sciences Project, Space Sciences Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley. In addition, see:

Boffey, Philip M. "Systems Analysis: No Panacea for Nations' Domestic Problems." Science, 158:1028-30, 1967.

Carter, L. J. "Systems Approach: Political Interest Rises." Science. 153:1222-1224, 1966.

It is perhaps redundant to remind this audience that military social workers are in the public service.

Future Development of Systems Thought in Army Social Work

The further development of systems thought in military social work beyond that being accomplished at this conference calls for a two-pronged effort.

First, it calls for interested military social workers, each in his own particular sphere of activity, to familiarize himself sufficiently with systems thought to be able to apply it in a selected aspect or portion of his work. This means to apply it in as thoroughgoing way as possible at various levels of military social work practice. For example, in leadership and managerial level activities as chief of social work service, director of social work education at the Field Medical School at Fort Sam Houston, staff officer and social work consultant activities at army level, staff officers at the Pentagon, consultant and administrative work in the Office of the Surgeon General and administration in the Office for Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (OCHAMPUS) at Denver. Also in research activities at various installations.[3] Similarly, it means using systems thought in direct service activities at the

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Schultze, Charles L. The Politics and Economics of Public Spending. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1968, Pp. 143.

Wolfe, Harry B. "Systems Analysis and Urban Planning - The San Francisco Housing Simulation Model." Transactions New York Academy of Science. Series II. 29,8:1043-1049, June 1967.

[3] In lieu of further discussion of systems-oriented research in this paper, attention is directed to Robert S. Weiss. "Issues in Holistic Research." in Howard S. Becker, et al., editors. Institutions and the Person: Papers Presented to Everett C. Hughes. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1968, Pp. 372 at pp. 342-350.

Mental Hygiene Consultation Service (MHCS), Army Community Service (ACS), hospital social services, the clearing station, the stockade program; it also encompasses direct work with the individual soldier, the small peer group, and the military family.

Second, the future development of systems ideas in army social work calls for a mutual exchange effort whereby varied experiences in using systems thought are widely shared throughout military social work organizations. For some guidance in this connection, I can do no better than to cite a passage from an unrelated area but where a clear parallelism lies in the effort to extract and organize knowledge from practice experience in order to share that knowledge with others. The passage reads as follows:

> "As I continue to watch the efforts of labor unions to organize Southern industrial establishments, I find myself unavoidably involved with problems of conceptualization. As the fight goes on between the warring camps of union and management, so does my own side-struggle with linguistic construction. I shift my attention back and forth between event and word, sign and symbol, with the question pressing over [ever] more urgently: What conceptual framing shall I use to systematize my thinking, to guide further observation, and to move toward ultimate refinement of generalization? How are conditions, developments and outcomes of the campaign to be given a coherent structure of abstraction? What are to be the terms of explanation, and how are they to be interrelated? Although my immediate end is to account for success and failure of the organizing campaign, I have, during the course of inquiry, experienced an expansion in regard to ultimate aims. Interest now extends to development of conceptual tools that may be widely applicable, not only to the organizing process but to processes of social conflict and other types of intergroup relations.[4]

Domain of Applicability

Before moving further into discussion of the use of system science in social work practice, a statement as to what is encompassed by the terms

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[4]Donald F. Roy. "The Union-Organizing Campaign as a Problem of Social Distance: Three Crucial Dimensions of Affiliation-Disaffiliation." In Howard S. Becker, et al., editors. Institutions and the Person: Papers Presented to Everett C. Hughes. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968, Pp. 372 at pp. 49-66 at p. 50.

"social work practice" and "military social work" seems desirable. This will be accomplished through two statements on the scope of what is meant by social work practice and military social work.

Scope of Social Work Practice. In the context of this paper, the term social work practice is intended to convey the widest perspective and most comprehensive view and conception of social work. This is to say, the term is employed to encompass, in conventional terms, the theoretical-substantive content usually bound up with each of the following three groupings:

1) The six methods employed in social work practice: social casework, social groupwork, community organization, social administration, social action and social research;

2) The nine or more fields of social work practice wherein each of these methods finds employment: child welfare; income assurance and public assistance; medical social work; psychiatric social work; school social work; court and correctional social work; group recreation, informal education and socialization; community development and military social work; and

3) The customary eight or so levels of practice: with individuals; with families; with small peer groups (groupwork groups); neighborhood and community groups and organizations (ethnic communities, mutual aid groups, and intergroups); educational, therapeutic and resocialization communities; pathway, treatment and service organizations; the social welfare system as an entity; institutional change and institution building at various levels--locality, state, regional, national, international.

Scope of Military Social Work. In the context of seeking to apply systems thought to military social work, and without attempting to conceptualize the underlying idea, the term military social work is meant to

encompass the full spectrum of activities currently being carried on by military social workers. This enumeration includes consultation to command in the field program, and direct service in the field program, service on disposition boards, administration of social work services in hospitals and clinics, all the various types of activities carried on under the auspices of the Mental Hygiene Consultation Service and Army Community Services, provision of consultation at army level, staff officer assignments at various levels of command, clearing stations work, research under various auspices. Involved are the individual soldier, the small peer group, the military family and governance of post and field commands.

Developing Systems Thought: Four Interrelated Concepts

Increasingly specific ways of coming down on the problem of using systems thought in military social work and in social work practice, as these were defined in the preceding section on the "Domain of Applicability," can be charted under four terms - systems perspective, systems approach, systems analysis and design, and theoretical imperatives.

The Systems Perspective. A systems perspective provides the basic point of view, and in a philosophical and scientific sense, speaks to the nature of reality. A system, following Bertalanffy, is "a dynamic order of parts and processes standing in mutual interaction."[5]

The system perspective stands in contrast with the notion of anything being simply an aggregate of parts. For example, the concept of the personality as "a system of action located in a separate organism and considered in its continuity over time"[6] and which displays system properties stands

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[5]Ludwig von Bertalanffy. General Systems Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications. New York: George Braziller, 1968, Pp. 289 at p. 208.

[6]Odd Ramsöy. Social Groups as System and Subsystem. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963, Pp. 201 at p. 18.

in contrast with a view of the human organism as an aggregation of "reflexes, sensations, brain centers, drives, reinforced responses, traits, factors, and the like."[7]

Another component of systems thought is that of the assembly of systems (or subsystems) into larger systems ad infinitum--such systems being linked by the nature of their interactions and their inputs and outputs into larger and more inclusive systems.

Three central tenets, then, are <u>that reality is found in systems, that such systems are interlaced, and that such systems exhibit definite properties</u>.

<u>The Systems Approach</u>. In a professional context (<u>i.e.</u>, where there is an accepted charge to take rational and competent action with reference to a challenging or problematic situation within a defined domain), a systems perspective yields a systems approach.

The "systems approach" as an identifiable way of addressing a problem--either opportunities for development or problematic situations--revolves around the dual notion that reality occurs in systems and that, correspondingly, the way of addressing a problem must somehow be in accord with this view of reality. The systems approach in a professional context, therefore, constitutes an avenue of thought combining cognitive generalizations about the nature of systems as found in reality, and methodological ideas to guide both study of a system and efforts to intervene in, to design, or redesign a system. This is to say, that the methods for grasping and comprehending and intervening in an existing system or in designing a new one must themselves be in accordance with system ideas: they must reflect systems logic and undergo a systems theory test. Out of continued

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[7] Bertalanffy. <u>op. cit.</u> Bertalanffy goes on to say that, "Psychopathology clearly shows mental dysfunction as a system disturbance rather than as a loss of single functions."

work utilizing a systems perspective and approach emerges the means for systems analysis.

Systems Analysis and Design. Systems analysis and design is a term used here to designate the investigation of an existing system or the design of a revamped or new one from a systems perspective and approach and a prospective stance in that its thrust is in the direction of improved systems operations. The prospective stance involves knowledgeably altering an existing system or subsystem, or knowledgeably designing a new one and bringing about its empirical realization. A most important point when using systems analysis in social work practice, then, is to maintain a system-oriented perspective and approach and a prospective stance: Interminable analysis is to be avoided; a design decision is to be reached, action is to be taken.

As far as the use of systems analysis and design in social work practice is concerned, we need to stress that it does not take the place of judgment. For no decision rules are available, which, when applied to the data and information, will automatically yield a superior and more reliable decision. Rather, system analysis and design does two things:

1) It identifies information relevant to making an informed decision; and

2) It guides the assembly and display of this information in a form suitable to aid in reaching a judgment.

Haberstroh, in his "Organization Design and Systems Analysis," sets forth in a succinct way four distinguishing qualities plus a set of key ideas. As set forth by Haberstroh, four distinguishing qualities are as follows:

> Systems analysis can best be defined as a point of view plus a few key ideas, integrated into a logical pattern.... The point of view is abstract in that it deals with symbols that stand

> for aspects of real objects or their interrelationships. It is holistic (Rapoport & Horvath, 1959) in that it presumes to deal (symbolically) with objects, the fine structure of which is unknown or at least irrelevant. It is dynamic in that it is concerned with the behavior of these objects as it changes over time. It is pragmatic in that it is concerned with how a task or function can be or is performed...[8]

The key ideas making up the unique substantive character of systems analysis are set forth by Haberstroh in too great detail (pp. 1173-1179) to be quoted here but merit careful reading. These key ideas include model-building; the "black box" as the smallest element of a system being studied; inputs, outputs and transfer functions; the system's interchange with its environment and therefore open and closed systems; the nature and location of system boundaries; information transmission and regulation; system stability; feedback and feedback regulation; factorization and synthesis; adaptive control. These ideas are handled by Haberstroh in the context of their meaning and application to organizations, in contrast, say, to an abstract logical arrangement, or to this paper which handles system ideas in the context of social work practice.

Theoretical Imperatives. In seeking to make use of a systems approach in military social work and in social work generally, an immediate, essential, and continuing task is to identify and develop the theoretical imperatives (load-bearing concepts) which, taken together, comprise the underlying structure of ideas for use in analysis and design and for use in describing the kind, range and boundaries of systems which social workers encounter in their professional practice.

Such theoretical imperatives should enable and force attention to the essentials, should aid in identifying the system(s) and establishing

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[8]Chadwick J. Haberstroh. "Organization Design and Systems Analysis." James G. March, editor. Handbook of Organizations. Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1965, Pp. 1247 at pp. 1171-1211 at p. 1172.

the boundaries, and provide the basis for an explanatory account of the system(s) expressed in such dynamic terms that they afford avenues for professional entry or intervention into the identified systems. The account must be in dynamic and not static terms by virtue of the nature of professional interest in the system--which is not only to describe a system, but to act in relation to it: The account of the system therefore must be in dynamic terms geared to such an interventionary responsibility.

An Illustration from Political Science

The kind of intellectual work required for further development of systems thought in social work may be illustrated by drawing your attention to David Easton's use of systems thought in the understanding of political life and institutions. In his A Systems Analysis of Political Life[9] and his A Framework for Political Analysis,[10] Easton knits together a series of theoretical imperatives into a coherent structure of ideas with which to exam political behavior and to account for the persistence and ongoingness of a political system. His minimal set of concepts which he skillfully weaves into a pattern of analysis include: open system, intra-societal and extra-societal environments, disturbances, stress, essential variables, the critical range of essential variables, boundaries and exchanges or transactions that cross boundaries, inputs as summary variables (demands and support), outputs, feedback loop.[11]

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[9]David Easton. A Systems Analysis of Political Life. New York: John Wiley, 1965.

[10]David Easton. A Framework for Political Analysis. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965, Pp.

[11]David Easton. Op. cit., Chapter 2, pp. 17-35. Chapter 2 is reprinted in Walter Buckley, editor. Modern Systems Research for the Behavioral Scientist: A Source Book. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968, Pp. 525 at pp. 428-436.

Nothing comparable in rigor and extent to Easton's work has yet appeared in relation to military social work nor to social work generally. However, elements of systems thought have been applied to selected topics of social work, and diverse theoretical imperatives have been identified and discussed and sketchily embedded in an underlying structure of ideas.[12] The papers and discussions generated by this week's conference should give a forward thrust to the use of systems ideas in military social work.

The Use and Construction of Models in Professional Practice: A Preliminary Paradigm Employing System Ideas

In the systems thought, the construction and use of models play a significant part as a technical tool. The remaining portion of this paper, perhaps to the neglect of other significant elements of systems thought, is devoted to the construction and the place of models in the everyday practice of social work.

There seems to be a general agreement among system theorists that model construction is the indispensible intellectual tool in systems science in that it is the only available intellectual tool capable of portraying the complexities of a system and thus of reality. Use of models appears indispensible in working with the "organized complexities" with which social workers customarily deal. A model may be defined as a compact, parsimonious representation or statement of essential facts, central ideas and concepts, and their interrelations within the domain established for the model. A model useful in a problematic situation"sets forth all pertinent attainable aspects of the problem, takes into account its inner relationships,

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[12] Gordon Hearn, editor. The General Systems Approach: Contributions Toward an Holistic Conception of Social Work. New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1969, Pp. 72.

and grasps faithfully the outside factors impinging on it...."[13]

In professional practice--whether administrative, consultative, or direct service--the objective of model construction is to build representations of the systems and subsystems involved that will be useful in the empirical phases of an overall cycle--a cycle which includes model building and empirical realization of the models.[14]

In an exploratory vein, I would like to suggest that in most instances--but not necessarily in all--the construction of three distinct but interrelated models is required (see Appendix 1). One is a model (A) of the existing empirical system, the operation of which affords an opportunity for development or in some way is deemed unsatisfactory and poses a problematic situation. The third is a model (C) of the revised system, labelled a "goal model," which corrects for the unsatisfactory operation

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[13] I. R. Hoos, Supra., p. 3.

For the author's prior discussion of the use of models in social work practice see Donald E. Lathrope, "Use of Social Science in Social Work Practice: Social Systems." in National Association of Social Workers. Trends in Social Work Practice and Knowledge: NASW Tenth Anniversary Symposium. New York: NASW, 1966, Pp. 264 at pp. 213-226, at pp. 216-220, 225-226; and Donald E. Lathrope, "The General Systems Approach in Social Work Practice" in Gordon Hearn, editor. The General Systems Approach: Contributions Toward an Holistic Conception of Social Work. New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1969, Pp. 72 at pp. 45-62 at pp. 46-49.

[14] This formulation has been influenced by one set forth by Haberstroh. He writes:

> The objective of model-building is to construct a symbolic representation of the total system that will be useful in the empirical phases. In order for the model to be useful, there is implied a developed art linking the model to the empirical system. For hardware systems, of course, this is the ability to construct equipment from the blueprints and specifications that are the output of the model-building phase.... In organizations, the analogous process is planning...

Chadwick J. Haberstroh. "Organization Design and Systems Analysis." in James G. March, editor. Handbook of Organizations. Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1965, Pp. 1171-1211 at p. 1173.

found in A or aims at taking advantage of an opportunity for development. The second is a model (B) of a temporary intersystem ("the helping system") which in its empirical phase functions to design the goal model (C) and to bring about the real-life transition from A to C. In this schema, model construction is thus one or more phases in an overall cycle that includes other phases devoted to the empirical realization of the model (B) of the temporary intersystem and of the goal model (C).

Let us next exam each of the three models for their distinctive characteristics and their interrelatedness.

The Existing Empirical System. The first model (A), that of the existing empirical system, the social worker builds in order to systematize his thinking, to order his data, to reconstruct the etiology, to guide further observations, and to develop his probationary concept of the opportunity or the problematic situation--its participants, its social-psychological dynamics, and its systemic connections. The problem of the location and nature of the boundaries of the system of reference is also important. The model (A) of the existing system embodies the social worker's understanding of the empirical system, and it is out of this model (A) that the social worker makes his contribution to the collaboratively-arrived-at model (C) of the proposed revision of the existing system. It also guides his efforts toward the empirical realization of both these models (B and C).

With reference to the faithfulness or isomorphism and utility of his model of the existing system (A) the social worker must assume exclusive responsibility for that, as he is the builder, although he is almost always dependent upon others for the basic data to incorporate into the model. With reference to the other two models, however, he shares responsibility for their construction and progress toward their empirical

realization with other participants in the system.

Recapitulation of the Paradigm. Let us recapitulate before moving on: In order to move from the existing state of affairs as set forth by the working model (A) of the existing empirical system toward a revamped empirical system some intermediate accomplishments are needed: One is the collaborative building of a working model (C) of the revamped empirical system (i.e., the goal model) representing a more desirable state of affairs than currently exists. Another step consists of collaborative efforts to bring about the empirical realization of the goal model. In order to accomplish these steps a helping system model (B) - a temporary intersystem - is required as well as its empirical realization.

These three model-building efforts are quite distinct: that is, the building of a model (A) of the existing system, the collaborative building of a model (B) of the goal-oriented helping intersystem, and the collaborative building of the model (C) of the revamped system. There is, however, overlap in building materials and in model construction technique.

Task-Oriented Models.[15] The central idea around which to build the suggested models is the notion of the primary task - actual or envisioned:[16] actual for an existing empirical system, envisioned for one that is to be brought into being.

In the case of an existing empirical system, construction revolves around answers to the questions: What work is the system actually doing?

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[15]For a prior discussion of this see Donald E. Lathrope. "The General Systems Approach in Social Work Practice." op. cit., pp. 54-55, 60.

[16]The distinction some writers have made between "growth-oriented groups" and "task oriented groups" is not germaine here. For examples of such usage see Gertrude Wilson. "The Group Worker's Role in Group Situations," in Marjorie Murphy. The Social Group Work Method on Social Work Education. New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1959, pp. 129-168, and Gisela Konopka. "Social Group Work: A Social Work Method." Social Work. 5, :53-61, October 1960. In the usage being employed here, the growth-oriented group, as well as the "task-oriented group" are working on tasks which can be set forth in a "task model."

Around what motif are events revolving? Or if the interest lies in redesigning a system or in designing an entirely new one - what work is the envisioned system designed to be doing?

In most, if not all the professional fields where system thought is being employed, the construction of task-oriented models is, or so it seems to me, to be centrally important, zeroing in on the question of what tasks or "work" does the system or subsystem actually do? Hence the central importance of the input-conversion-output formulation.[17] In engineering, management, organization theory, aerospace technology, biological research, et cetera, the central interest lies in what "work" the system does or is being designed to do; that is, what is it to produce? Associated questions include: What function does it perform, as a system or subsystem thereof, in relation to the system as a whole? What consequences does its operations have for the operation of the total system? What is the ultimate system criterion? Or, expressed in more popularized terms: "What is the big-picture payoff?" Most, if not all, of these observations pertain to the intersystem discussed in the next section.

Using a natural system--the human organism--for an example to illustrate the point regarding the primary task, we can direct inquiry as to what work the circulatory system, the nervous system, the reproductive, the digestive, the endocrine subsystems, et cetera, do? While it is possible and necessary to investigate these systems as separate systemic entities, it seems obvious that each is a subsystem which can be fully understood only by asking what work does it do, and by understanding its relation to the whole: the big-picture payoff; the functioning human being.

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[17]Donald E. Lathrope, "The General Systems Approach in Social Work Practice." op. cit., pp. 49-57.

In social work practice, pursuit of this line of thought in the usual casework and groupwork situations reveals that the "task" typically involves a coping task of some kind,[18] the carrying out of a "life task," or a role performance or role making task(s). In administrative practice, it may, for example, involve in-service training, that is, organization of the learning task(s) of the staff. In program design and development it involves the question of what the program in its empirical phase is to accomplish. In command consultation in military social work, it involves the command responsibilities (tasks, functions) of the line officer and the non-commissioned officer, and the soldiering tasks of the soldier.

In setting up the "primary task model" embedded in an existing situation, it is crucially important to identify the actual task being worked on and not merely the task set up to be worked on. For example, it seems very clear that the day-dreaming school child, the AWOL soldier, the goldbricking soldier, the acting-out adolescent, the compulsive drinker, the embezzling employee, the neglectful parent are in fact working on entirely different tasks than those ostensibly and conventionally set out for them to work on. As direct, intelligible work on such ostensible tasks, their behaviors may be completely incomprehensible or bizarre, whereas in relation to the actual tasks on which they are engaged, the bizarre, irrational behaviors may become understandable--rational, intelligible, and functionally consistent.[19]

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[18]William E. Gordon. "Basic Constructs for an Integrative and Generative Conception of Social Work." in Gordon Hearn. op. cit., at pp. 5-11.

[19]For a pertinent example, see Jerome S. Bruner. Toward a Theory of Instruction. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966 at pp. 3-4, quoted in D. E. Lathrope. "The General Systems Approach in Social Work Practice." in Gordon Hearn, editor. The General Systems Approach: Contributions Toward an Holistic Conception of Social Work. New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1969, pp. 45-62 at pp. 55-56.

In this connection, a basic assumption is that the uncovering of the actual task(s) absorbing attention and energy is a necessary prelude to correction or redirection, although more than an uncovering is involved. Some resolution of the attention absorbing task itself may also be a necessary prelude to more effective functioning in relation to the task on which one ostensibly should be working. For example, the task of controlling a free-floating anxiety which successively attaches itself to every decision responsibility may skew aspects of a range of role performances and may require both recognition and resolution of an underlying difficulty. The construction of the model of the concrete case incorporates the actual task(s) on which the client or client group is working, which is probably a melange of the ostensible tasks and these other privatized tasks.

An Action Intersystem: "Helping Systems" and "Decision Structures."

To work effectively on a problematic situation or on an opportunity for development, the social worker collaboratively works with an individual or group to bring into existence a "helping system" or "decision structure." One phase of such collaborative work is to build together an agreed-upon model that both the social worker and the others accept of the proposed helping system or decision structure. It is out of this agreed-upon model that both the social worker and the others involved act, and this lends coherence to their joint work. The second phase is to bring about, again jointly with others - either simultaneously or sequentially - the empirical realization of the model.

In the direct service situation, this action intersystem may appropriately be labelled the "helping system"; at other levels of practice it may perhaps be more appropriately labelled a "decision structure" and "decision system," although both systems involve the making of decisions and the taking of action. A typology of action systems and intersystems involved in social work practice is set forth in the accompanying chart (Appendix 2).

In the social treatment situation with individuals or groups, the task is to construct collaboratively with the client(s) a helping system - an intersystem - through the operations of which the client(s) can effectively work on a problematic situation or utilize an opportunity for development. In broad terms, this would be to revamp his "life systems" in some way. This might be to engage in social learning, to rid himself of a pervasive sense of powerlessness or anomie or alienation, or to engage himself in restructuring his feedback loop or mechanism,[20] in sensitizing his role perception capabilities, in learning role performance requirements; that is, to move on and out of a "risk population," or to use Arthur D. Smith's fine phrase, "to assure the individual of his ability to make higher ground."[21]

That is to say that through his work in the intersystem his operation in other of his life's systems will be more knowingly, more competently, or more acceptably performed; or be less costly to himself and others by his inability to take action in his own behalf, by anxiety, ambivalence,

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[20]Robert Chin. "The Utility of System Models and Developmental Models for Practitioners," in Warren G. Bennis, et al., editors. The Planning of Change: Readings in the Applied Behavioral Sciences. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961, Pp. 781 at pp. 201-214 at p. 206. Chin writes:

> Improving the feedback process of a client system will allow for self-steering or corrective action to be taken by him or it. In fact, the single most important improvement the change-agent can help a client system to achieve is to increase its diagnostic sensitivity to the effects of its own actions upon others. Programs in sensitivity training attempt to increase or unblock the feedback processes of persons; a methodological skill with wider applicability and longer-lasting significance than solving the immediate problem at hand. In diagnosing a client system, the practitioner asks: What are its feedback procedures? How adequate are they? What blocks their effective use? Is it lack of skill in gathering data, or in coding and utilizing the information?

[21]Arthur Delafield Smith. The Right to Life. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955, Pp. 204 at p. 172 (also available in paperback).

self-doubt, compulsions, addictions, "weekend neuroses," self-defeating behavior, panic, the crippling affective states such as anxiety, depression, agitation; or less costly to others through neglect, abuse, desertion, absenteeism, dependency, displaced aggression, role abandonment. The operation of the intersystem would hopefully enable him to be more capable under stress, say when reality needs are intense, or interrupt the sequelae associated with social isolation.[22]

Currently, a variety of names are given to efforts to create such direct helping systems, although they may not ordinarily be conceptualized as systems or intersystems. These designations include the "casework dyad," the "groupwork group," group counseling, activity group therapy, group therapy, analytic group psychotherapy, joint interviewing, family therapy, guided group interaction.

The existing social work literature provides direct help or clues for construction of a helping system. For example, some specifications for collaborative construction of such a "helping system" (intersystem) are found in Schwartz, "The Social Worker in the Group."[23] Some specifications regarding construction of helping system (intersystem) using brief contacts may be found in Purcell's "The Helping Professions and the Problems of the Brief Contact in Low Income Areas."[24]

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[22]E. Gartley Jaco. "The Social Isolation Hypothesis and Schizophrenia." American Sociological Review. 19, 5:567-577, October 1954.

[23]William Schwartz. "The Social Worker in the Group." National Association of Social Workers. New Perspectives on Services to Groups: Theory, Organization, Practice. New York: NASW, 1961, Pp. 160 at pp. 7-29, also National Conference on Social Welfare. Social Welfare Forum 1961. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, Pp. 325 at pp. 146-171.

[24]Francis P. Purcell. "The Helping Professions and the Problems of the Brief Contact in Low Income Areas." In Frank Riessman, et al., editors. Mental Health of the Poor: New Treatment Approaches for Low Income People. New York: Free Press, 1964, Pp. 648 at pp. 431-439.

It seems desirable to close this section on building "the helping system" with an admonition on that which is to be avoided when collaboratively constructing a helping system with a client. Burns and Glasser mistakenly write that responsibility rests solely on the social worker--not significantly upon both:

> In the casework dyad, however, the responsibility for both problem-solving and system-maintenance rests upon one person, the worker. It is the worker who must take responsibility both for the professional nature and conduct of the relationship and for the professional direction of purposive interaction in the interest of solving or ameliorating the problem for which the client is seeking help.[25]

Modeling the Redesigned System. Modeling the redesigned system involves construction of a working model of a normative system. The locus of work, of course, both for construction of the model of the redesigned system and the movement toward its empirical realization is the helping system or the "decision structure." Therefore, it is collaboratively worked out with the people in the system. The modeling task involves the discovery and acceptance of a normative model. Such a collaboratively-arrived-at model serves system participants with an opportunity collaboratively to create a conceptual construct of a more desired state of affairs: One toward which movement can be directed, and toward which change efforts can be focused. It serves as a lobestone to attract emotional and intellectual investment and commitment, also for reality testing, and as a goal against which to measure progress.

Dangers and Pitfalls in the Use and Construction of Models

As valuable as model construction is an intellectual tool, it is neither a panacea nor without its own dangers. Included among the pitfalls are "ritual models," "recondite models," "modelism," and "solution-saturated" models.

[25] Mary E. Burns and Paul H. Glasser. "Similarities and Differences in Casework and Group Work Practice." Social Service Review, 37, 4:416-428, December 1963. The thought is attributed to Helen Harris Perlman. Social Casework: A Problem Solving Process. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, pp. 64-83. Compare Arthur D. Smith on the nature of the professional idea, op cit pp171-93.

Ritualistic Modeling.[26] Ritualistic model construction, either intentional or unknowingly, results in nonuseful statements. Ritualistic modeling can be recognized by any of the following, although this list is probably not exhaustive.

1. When models are constructed in a highly routinized, non-individualized way where form rather than substance dominates, and little or no illumination or insight results.

2. When model construction becomes "magic-like rituals involved by confused and frustrated decision makers or advisors to decision makers."[27]

3. When model construction is used as an alternative to action. Because of the almost unlimited interconnectedness of things revealed by a system approach, it is possible to spin out analysis and models very extensively. It is easy to use this as a device to stall or kill action.

4. When model construction is used to impress rather than inform. Ritualistic modeling may emerge in connection with entry into a new role or when a non-obvious reversal of roles occurs and it may appear expedient "to involve the practice of ritual modeling to validate one's role... [and] to impress the uninitiated."[28] Not all ritualistic modeling is consciously intended, of course. For, as Merton argues, reliance on ritualism is a common "mode of adaptation" among the middle classes, particularly the lower middle class.[29]

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[26]The discussion in this section is based on Robert Boguslaw. The New Utopians: A Study of System Design and Social Change. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965, Pp. 213 at pp. 65-67.

[27]Ibid., p. 65.

[28]Ibid., p. 67.

[29]Robert K. Merton. Social Theory and Social Structure. New York: Free Press, Pp. 645 at pp. 149-153 and pp. 184-187.

Recondite Models. Models can obfuscate as well as clarify. As summed up by Boguslaw,

> ...although the word model normally evokes images of clarity and simplicity, the formalist approach to system design frequently results in the use of models whose meaning remains obscure.[30]

Modelism. Model construction may become of such absorbing interest that it becomes an end in itself. Yielding to the temptation of "being more interested in the model than one is in the real world"[31] is called "modelism."

"Solution-Saturated" Models of Empirical Systems. If a model purported to portray an existing situation seems automatically to prompt self-evident solutions, it should be viewed with care, if not with outright suspicion and dismay. For what it means is simply that instead of being a model of an actually existing empirical situation it is a "solution-saturated model" wherein implied solutions, either unwittingly or knowingly held, have governed the study.[32] In such cases the terms of the description and analysis are not neutral and revelatory but rather that one or more preconceived "solutions" has determined the terms of the study and the central ideas employed. It is certainly not uncommon in all walks of

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[30] Boguslaw, op. cit., p. 68 and ff.

[31] Boguslaw, Ibid., citing Herman Kahn and Irwin Mann. Ten Common Pitfalls. Santa Monica, California: The RAND Corporation, 1957.

[32] The problem touched upon here is a profound one. For it raises the problem of whether anything and everything perceived as a problem is perceived because - and only because - some solution, some remedy, some way of moving toward an envisioned more desirable state of affairs is evident or available. In other words, can one, indeed, envision a more desirable state of affairs, unless there simultaneously is envisioned a remedy as a goal, or as a way of working on something that is plausibly acceptable? The problem is related to the whole explanatory problem of why and how a "social problem" emerges as a "social problem" at a given time in a given society - a complex and puzzling intellectual problem.

life to find that the essential ingredients in a messy situation have been selected and set forth in such a way that doing the opposite of what is being done seems the automatic, self-evident, corrective solution. That is, the model's construction was directed by a conscious or unconscious entrenched point of view which so permeated the findings that the "solution" is indeed self-evident.

It is a very commonplace device to conclude falsely that by just doing the opposite of what is described as currently undesirable, the situation will automatically be corrected. Whenever a "solution" emerges as self-apparent from the identification or attribution of "causes," then an important part of what should be conscious and reviewable has indeed been left unexamined. All proposed "solutions" must be rigorously examined on their own merits in the light of a systematic examination of their implications if actually introduced into the empirical system. They must not be merely accepted as plausible in the light of a descriptive analysis of what is wrong - no matter how cogently the difficulty itself is described and analyzed and how carefully "the causes" are spelled out.

Recapitulation

In order to make use of systems thought in social work practice three major bridging ideas or thrusts were suggested. One was a four-tiered effort, each level successively coming closer down on the problem of effectively using systems thought in social work practice. The second major idea concerned the use of system models in social work practice. The third idea was to urge the sharing of experience.

The four-tiered effort called for, first, the gaining of sufficient familiarity with a systems perspective as a way of looking at things to think retrospectively and currently about problems of practice in systems terms. Second, it called for the fashioning of a systems approach out of

the system perspective by identifying some of its critical elements and uniting these with a prospective stance and with concrete problems encountered in the practice of social work. At the third level, it called for devising and developing a set of procedures and techniques for systems analysis and systems design relative to the type of problems being handled in social work. At the fourth level, it called for the setting forth of probationary conceptual imperatives to link the essentials into an intelligible whole.

The second major thrust dealt with models, and directed attention at model construction as a compatible and necessary intellectual tool in using systems thought. Three essential practice models were identified. First, one of the existing system which answers the question: What do I know about how the existing system works? Second, a jointly-built model of the intersystem as a "helping system" or "decision structure" which answers the question: How are we going to work together toward definition and achievement of whatever we are striving for in the way of a revamped or new system? Third, a jointly-built model of the revamped or new system which answers the question: What are we striving for in the way of a revamped or new system?

Overall, the social worker is urged to share with others his experiments with systems-oriented practice as well as reflections on such experiences.

The rationale for all of these kinds of suggestions has been well set forth by Donald F. Roy in his report on his efforts to extract knowledge from experience:

> As practitioners they search out the various constituents of the situation to determine the nature of the...problem in all its discernibly relevant features. Allowing for

> the rigidities of routinized practice, one might claim that they "experiment" at a common sense level of symbolization and procedure. Their efforts to change...situations..., their attempts to gain and apply a workable knowledge of their craft, are of a piece with the shaking, rattling, prying, pounding, turning and other manipulations of materials that characterized the finding-out and shaping-up operations in the industrial arts of an earlier time. In these kinds of "doing," rather than in the cerebrations of "professional knowers," may be located the source springs of the activity called "science."[33]

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[33]Donald F. Roy, op. cit., p. 50-51, citing John Dewey. The Quest for Certainty. New York: Menton, Baleh, 1929, pp. 86-88. The deletions were made to make the quotation more widely applicable by removing references to the particular field of effort Roy was examining, that of labor union organizing.

APPENDIX 1

The Use of Models in a Systems Approach to Social Work Practice.
Building Models as Phases in an Overall Cycle: Diagrammed as a Linear Process and as an Iterative Process.
Prepared by D. E. Lathrope, September 1969

Figure 1. As a Linear Process

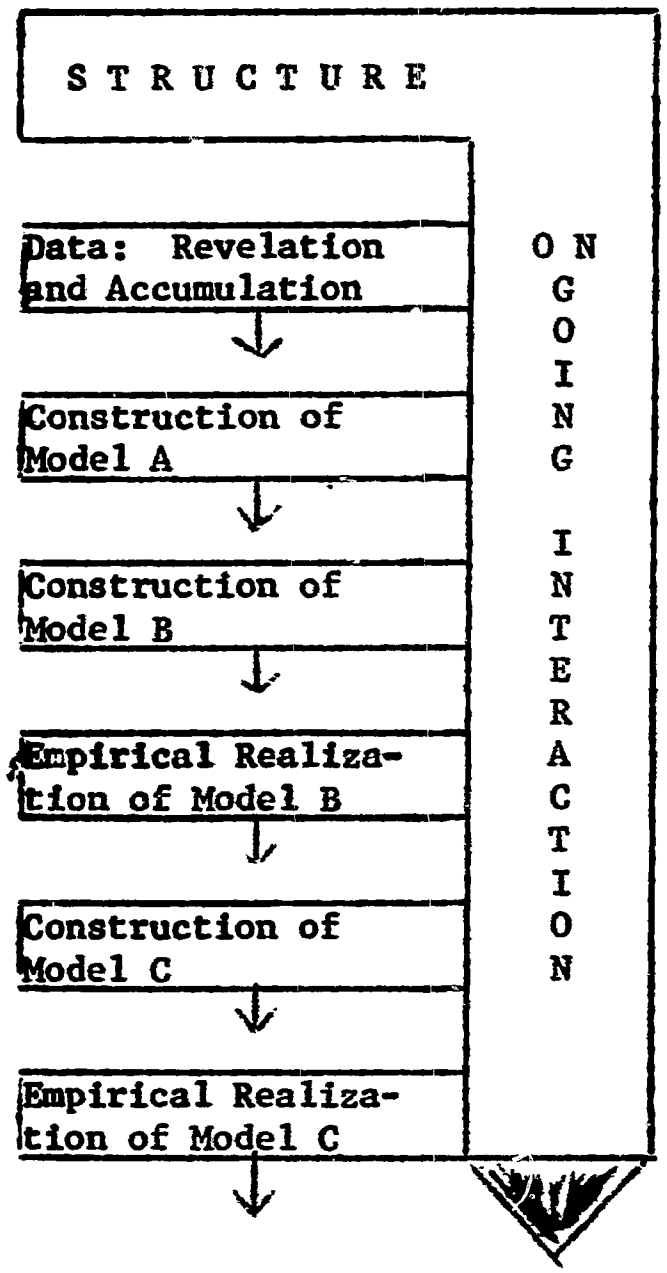
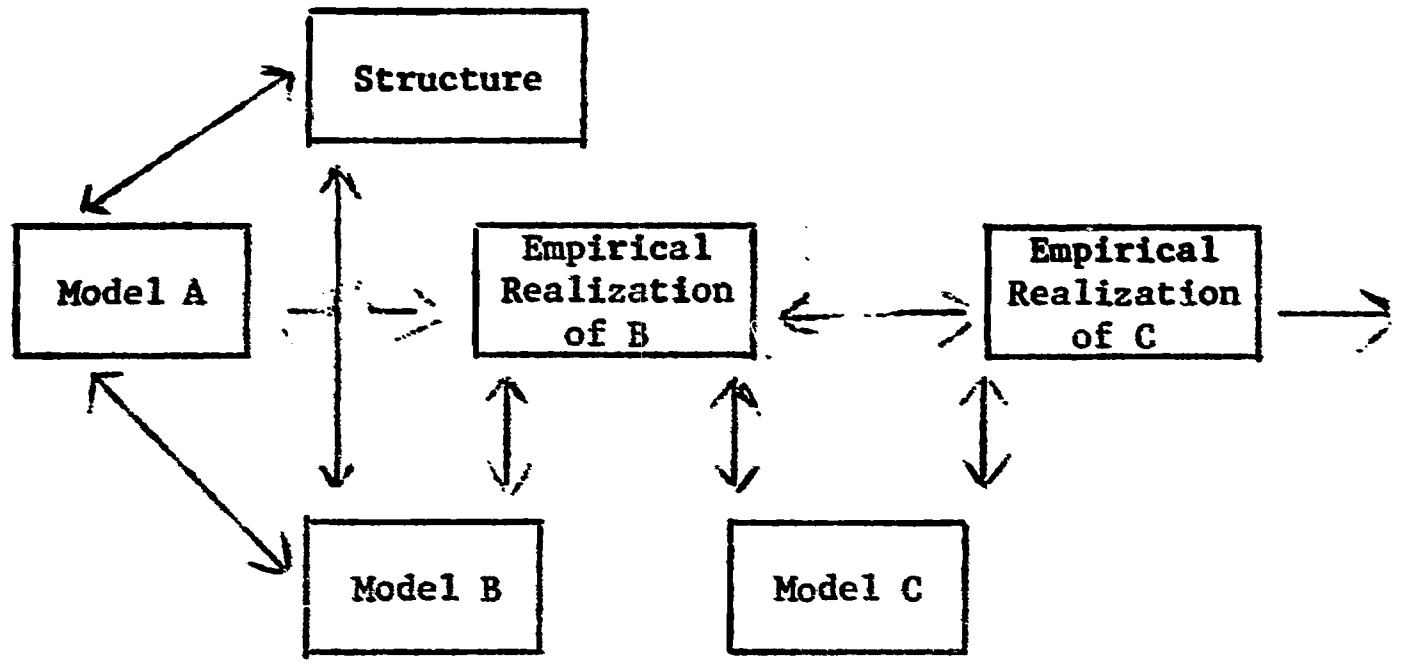


Figure 2. As an Iterative Process



Explanation: Models of the Concrete Case, Figures 1 and 2

Model A. Social worker's model of the existing empirical system. Answers the question: How does the present system work?

Model B. Model of the temporary intersystem--the helping system or "decision structure." Answers the question: How are we going to work together toward definition and achievement of whatever we are striving for?

Model C. Working model(s) of the revamped or new system: one or more "goal models." Answers the question: What are we striving for?

The single arrowheads indicate straight line progression. The double arrowheads indicate reciprocating interaction and influence. The thrust is toward the empirical realization of C; that is, toward the emergence of a revamped or new on-going empirical system.

APPENDIX II

A Typology of Action Systems and Helping Systems Involved in Social Work Practice: A Chart*

by D. E. Lathrope September 1969

------A. Conceptualization of the Subject(s) of------- Social Work Attention		B. Modes of Supportive/ ----Alterative Action-----
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Conceptualization of the subject (i.e., client system) of social work effort before intervention	Plugging social work into an existing system as an interventionary tool alters the original system--creates an intersystem	Knowledgeable modes of action toward the object of effort; social worker acting toward or within the system
1a. Person System I: Person(s) in their general life situation: interpersonal competence, life style, coping behaviors & patterns, and his (their) environmental surround	1b. Dyadic System Mutually created, temporary intersystem brought into being to sustain or alter Person System I	1c. Conceptualization involves 1. an assembly of systems and sub-systems; 2. components and their attributes; 3. an appropriate account of the system
2a. Person System II: 1. Intrapsychic system 2. Belief-disbelief system	2b. Dyadic System Mutually created, temporary intersystem brought into being to sustain or alter Person System II	2c. Availability of supportive/alterative tools reciprocally influences the conceptualization i.e., 1. points of entry 2. points of application 3. points of pressure 4. leverage points 5. points of influence 6. provisions 7. care 8. services 9. control
3a. Family--as an interactive entity	3b. Family plus worker-catalysis and resystemization. Mutually created, temporary intersystem to sustain or alter the existing family system	3c. Purposes and desired outcomes influence the conceptualization i.e., highlight and suppress vantage points
4a. Small Groups 1. task groups conference planning decision-making 2. patients 3. parents 4. street gangs 5. interest 6. recreational	4b. Adding social worker to natural or formed group creates a new group (or intersystem) with altered dynamics--needs, themes and energies	4c. Partialization and simplification: partition into components & uncoupling. Criterion of suitability: avoid division lethal to the mode of integration which makes the whole system viable.[1]

*Originally prepared for an Institute on Systems Thought in Social Work Practice, U.S. Army Tripler General Hospital, Honolulu, Hawaii, July 8-13, 1968.

Lathrope - A Typology of Action Systems (Chart)

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
5a. Treatment and Service organizations. Range: Limited service organizations to total institutions 1. ongoing operations 2. organizational change	5b. Social worker placed within the system 1. social worker as functionary; or 2. addition of social work consultant or trainer etc. to effect organizational change	
6a. Communities and Subcultures (community groups) 1. functional communities 2. therapeutic communities 3. ethnic subcultures 4. subculture(s) of poverty 5. transient communities 6. total institutions 7. neighborhoods 8. small communities 9. specialized communities: the military community	6b. The addition of a community social worker (enabler change agent, service agent, etc.) Alters the system with resulting alterations in dynamics--needs, themes, and the amount and distribution of energies	
7a. Social Welfare System Functions include: 1. program development & support 2. provision of goods and services 3. feedback to society & institutional change	7b. Social workers and social work as the central profession operate within the social welfare system	
8a. Societal Systems Distribution of power and resources, and life chances (social work/social welfare as part of the system of decision-making and allocation)	8b. Societal maintenance and change: formation of coalitions to affect decision making processes & outcomes. The Social Welfare System affects personal and societal outcomes by use of 1a to 7a and 1b to 7b, i.e., institution building & structural change	

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[1] S. Beer. "Below the Twilight Arch--A Mythology of Systems." Systems Research Center, Case Institute of Technology. Systems: Research and Design: Proceedings of the First Systems Symposium at Case Institute of Technology. Donald P. Eckman, editor. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1961, Pp. 310 at pp. 1-25 at pp. 13-15.